



SB 230

Montana Board of Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists Testimony

Senate Business, Labor, & Economic Affairs Committee

My name is Lynn Harris. I am an audiologist and speech-language pathologist currently serving as Chair of the Montana Board of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists. At our most recent Board Meeting, the decision was made to support SB 230. I am commenting on behalf of the Board.

The responsibility of the Board is simple: we are to protect the consumers of speech-language pathology and audiology services through licensure and regulation. It is paramount to the Board that we ensure that the services provided to the residents of Montana are services of excellent quality. Traditionally, speech-language and audiology services have been provided face to face and in person. There are provisions in the rules and statutes that allow the speech-language pathologist or audiologist to work with an assistant in providing services. There are extensive rules regarding supervision, education, etc. regulating the use of aides.

Times are changing. Service providers are stretched by the distances we must travel in Montana and the needs and numbers of those we serve. Nationally there has been a move towards telepractice, not just in speech-language pathology and audiology but in medicine and many related disciplines. Certainly there are times when telepractice may be the most efficacious way to provide services. But we must ensure that those services are of excellent quality. This bill is the first attempt in Montana to authorize telepractice for speech/language pathology and audiologists.

On a whole, SB 230 meets the requirements for ensuring quality services. The Board has authorized me to support the bill.

On the other hand, there are several things that could make this a stronger bill. In 37-15-102 Definitions (6), "facilitator means a trained individual..." The "training" required is not specified. Either this needs to be defined in the statutes with something like "approved by the board" or clearly defined in the rules.

Secondly, in New section 4 Scope of Telepractice-requirements (4), it is not clear that the initial assessment of the consumer of speech/language pathology or audiology services be done in person and face to face. It seems as though assessing candidacy for telepractice and assessing needs for intervention are two different elements. When discussing initial evaluations as a Board, the consensus was that the initial interviews, test administration etc. needed to be done in person. If there is not a change in this proposed legislation, this will need to be clarified in the rules as well.

Thank you for your careful and thoughtful consideration of these issues. Telepractice is here and now. The Board wants to ensure that all of the consumers of speech/language pathology and audiology services are provided with excellent care. This bill is the starting point and work will continue into the future.

Board Members

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*The duty of the board goes beyond licensing and regulation.
We are obligated to protect health care consumers.*

Board Quick Facts

- The Board licenses and regulates speech-language pathologists and audiologists.
- There are currently 68 active audiologists, 10 active audiologist aides, 396 active speech-language pathologists and 120 active speech aides licensed in Montana.
- Upon receipt of a licensure application at the Board office, it takes an average of 20 days to receive a license to practice as a licensee in Montana.
- The Board consists of five members. All five members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.
- Four of the five board members shall have been engaged in rendering services to the public, teaching, or performing research in the field of speech-language pathology or audiology for at least 5 years immediately preceding their appointment.
- Board members serve three year terms.

What is a State Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologist Board?

The Montana Board of Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists' primary responsibility and obligation is to protect health care consumers through proper licensing and regulation of licensure candidates. The ability to practice as a licensee is not an inherent right of an individual, but a privilege granted by the people of a state acting through their elected representatives. The public is protected from the unprofessional, improper and incompetent practice through laws and regulations. It is the duty of the Board of Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologist to regulate the practice.

Board Structure

Board membership is composed of volunteers who are charged with upholding the practice of the occupations. Five voting members are appointed by the Governor. The occupations licensed and regulated have four representative members on the Board with the additional member being a public member.

The Board is attached for administrative purposes to the Department of Labor and Industry. Funding comes from licensing fees. Any fines imposed are deposited into the general fund. Staff devoted to the Board includes licensing, legal, and an executive officer.

Licensure

Assembling a quality health care workforce to meet the needs of the public begins with licensure. Through the licensure process, the state ensures that individuals have appropriate education and training, and that they abide by recognized standards of professional conduct.

Regulation

The Board is charged with the responsibility of evaluating when a licensee's professional conduct or ability to practice as a speech-language pathologists or audiologist warrants modification, suspension or revocation of the license to practice. The Board is designed to meet and devote time and attention, to oversee the practice by reviewing complaints from consumers, information from schools and other health care institutions, as well as reports from government agencies. The Board has the power to further investigate a complaint and can impose some form of discipline such as mandated continuing education or seek to restrict, suspend or revoke a license.

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